

## Hall Family's dedication to birth family visits after adoption leads to Family Ties award

Lidell and Jarvis Hall had only been licensed for a few short months when they received their first call in 2003. A brother and sister, both under four years old, had just been taken into protective custody and needed an immediate placement. This was the moment they had been preparing for, and they were eager to accept the challenge.

The Halls had just returned to their home community of East St. Louis, after living a number of years across the river in the St. Louis area.

"We wanted to do something for the community," said Jarvis. "We figured the best way was to develop young minds."

Their PRIDE Training left Lidell and Jarvis feeling well prepared for the fostering experience. Not long after the placement of the two siblings, Ahamad and Deoana, the Halls were able to put their classroom experience into practical action. They stepped forward and agreed to assist in facilitating visits between Ahamad and Deoana, and two other siblings

who were living with their maternal grandmother. In time, an increasingly positive relationship developed between the grandmother and the Halls, who allowed the grandmother to visit the children in their home and share holidays with them.

***"We wanted to do something for the community. We figured the best way was to develop young minds."***

*Jarvis Hall, adoptive father and recipient of the Family Ties Award for maintaining birth family relationships*

"We wanted to keep it as natural as possible," said Lidell.

Approximately one year after placement, the permanency plan was changed to termination of

parental rights with an adoption goal. In December 2004, Lidell and Jarvis consummated the adoption and had a new, legal family. However, they strongly believed that maintaining continued contact with the other siblings and grandmother is in Ahamad's and Deoana's best interest, and therefore allowed on-going visits in much the same way as before.

In November 2005, the case-worker who had facilitated the adoption nominated the Halls for the Family Ties award, which is presented yearly by the St Louis-based Foster Care and Adoptive Coalition. This honor recognizes families who work to support relationships between children and their birth families. The Halls were selected for this award and were invited to the annual Family Ties event, a children's theatre production. However, Lidell and Jarvis were unable to attend. They were busy that day... facilitating a visit between Ahamad, Deoana, and their sister and grandmother.

## Quality Improvement in Southern Region

The Southern Region, like other regions in the state, has a Quality Improvement (QI) Plan that creates a number of opportunities for foster parents to become involved in the QI process. The program is designed to identify barriers or problems in service delivery, and work at resolving those issues most directly at the lowest level of the organization. Issues that are unique to one region do not necessarily require statewide intervention, and they may be more appropriately addressed by those whom it impacts.

QI meetings are held at the field office, site, and regional levels. Foster parents are free to attend any of these meetings. Additionally, foster parents can raise issues via their foster parent support specialist, the family development specialist, or the Foster Parent Advisory Council.

The Department's reorganization provides foster parents with a unique opportunity to become involved. Child protection, intact family, and placement specialties will each have their own QI process. Foster parents will have a better chance of making their concerns known if they are active participants in the process. For more information on becoming involved in Quality Improvement, contact Terry Whipple at 618-244-8412. For more information about the advisory council, contact Michael Bollman at 618-394-2137.

## Regional Administrator thanks caregivers



*Bill Peyton*

I want to express my deepest appreciation for the foster parents of Southern Region. As I travel throughout the region and talk to foster parents I'm struck by the stories of meaningful interaction and caring expressed to me. I was recently at a foster parent meeting and heard the story of a special needs child that came into care and how the foster family worked with the child. There were nuances about the story that would bring tears to anyone's eye.

As I drove home from that meeting, I was thinking that this type of story is being played out every day or week in the lives of children and foster parents. We call foster parents our professional partners (and they are), but that term does not capture the meaning of the interactions you all have daily with children that come into care.

I said at the recent caregivers conference that foster parenting requires those who are "able", not simply those who are "willing". I've heard our Director say this before, and I think it means foster parenting requires a commitment and heart that not all possess. It takes special people to take in children and supply the substitute care which nurtures them toward more meaningful and healthy lives.

As we take the "lifetime approach" to our children in care, foster parents are called upon to participate in Integrated Assessment, know that young children need to be in school readiness programs, and be able to navigate the educational system to help them. We expect you to understand the Child and Youth Investment Teams and participate in the team decision-making model. You must also be aware of programs for the education and training of our older youth, all while providing nurturing, caring, and human relationships that children need to reach their full potential.

Thanks to all of you who do this work. It truly changes lives.

**Bill Peyton**  
**Regional Administrator**

### OUR KIDS

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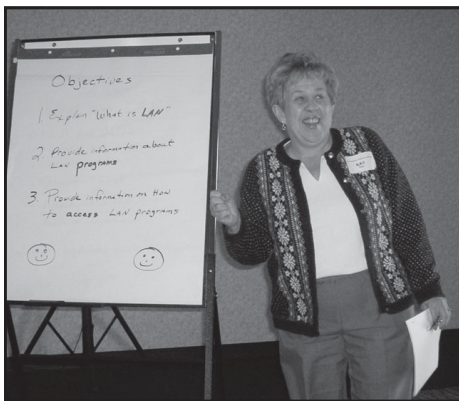
Anyone can call the regional reporter with foster parent association news and schedules; local training notices; features on foster families and community members working for children; photos; and ideas for news articles or supportive services that would be helpful for caregivers to know.

## Caregiver Institutes offer help to navigate transitions

The 2006 Caregivers' Institute, nine-stop statewide tour came to Southern Region on February 18 in Whittington and March 11 in Fairview Heights. The DCFS Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development's Office of Foster Parent Support Services, along with the divisions of Service Intervention and Operations, rallied a full slate of experts for a dynamic presentation on ways caregivers can help young people make effective transitions within and out of the child welfare system.

"These Institutes are our way to say thanks to caregivers by sharing information to help them as they help our young people," said Deputy Director Velma Williams.

The Saturday session started with several youth in care describing how the adults in their lives contributed to them moving successfully toward adulthood.



*Kay Teel explains the school-related supports available through Local Area Networks (LANs).*

Likewise, caregivers also heard the adult perspective on how to enhance that relationship. That personal testimony led into Regional Administrator Bill Peyton's opening remarks describing the Department's strategic direction and how caregivers will be involved.

The Integrated Assessment and the CAYIT program are two initiatives that call for caregivers to be better informed when cases are opened and more involved during the life of the case. Representatives from the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council also encouraged participants to use the local councils as a way to problem-solve and raise their voices.

The second portion of the training provided practical tips on how to move youth successfully toward self-sufficiency. The first important step is education. The Local Area Network Liaisons provided details on community programs to support students at-risk of suspension, expulsion, and truancy. The group also learned about resources from the DCFS Education Advocates to help caregivers work with schools more effectively. Since the home can also be like a classroom, caregivers were coached on how to find "teachable moments" to shore up life lessons on finances, employment and practical matters.



*Youth in DCFS care Carl Acklin (left) and Larry Abraham (far right) offered their thoughts on how foster parents like Nancy Fuller can help prepare youth for adulthood. David West of DCFS moderated the discussion.*

Young people prepared with a foundation of education and life skills will be ready to move on to college or employment. Staff from the Office of Education and Transition shared with caregivers many services and programs for both options. Perhaps spurred by the thought of youth embarking on successful, self-sufficient lives, the caregivers left the training informed and energized.

"My wife drags me to these trainings and I usually hate them. This one was fun and I learned a lot. I am coming back next year," said one foster father (who wishes to remain anonymous).

The Office of Foster Parent Support Services is taking that feedback and evaluations from the series of institutes to make plans for 2007. For more information or to receive materials, contact the office at 217-524-2422.

## Southern Region Training Calendar

### FosterPRIDE In-Service Training

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

There are no Foster PRIDE In-Service training modules scheduled for this quarter.

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

There are no Foster PRIDE In-Service training modules scheduled for this quarter.

### Integrated Assessment Training

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**EDWARDSVILLE** *Technology Management Ctr.*  
June 13 (Tue) 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

There are no Integrated Assessment trainings scheduled for this quarter.

### Educational Advocacy

Two 3-hour sessions =  
6 training hours

It is mandatory for one foster parent in each family to attend Educational Advocacy Training in order to be re-licensed. Educational Advocacy Training is offered following each Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE training and many additional times. This six-hour course covers information foster parents need to know so that they can advocate for their foster children's educational rights and needs.

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** *DCFS Office*  
June 6 & 13 (Tue) 6:30-9:30 p.m.

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

**MARION** *State Office Building*  
June 17 (Sat) 9 a.m.-4 p.m.

**MT. VERNON** *DCFS Office*  
June 17 & 24 (Sat) 9 a.m.-12 p.m.

### Virtual Training

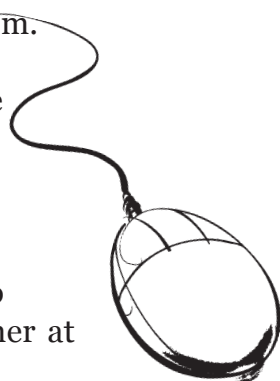
The DCFS Office of Training has blended technology with training in offering the new Virtual Training Center. The first on-line training for foster parents is called "Child and Family Team Meetings for Caregivers. Foster parents can earn three hours of training credits as they learn how a Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) helps the family and what the Caregiver's role is in the meeting.

Foster Parents can take this course using a computer in their home or coming to a DCFS facility, according to the schedule below:

- Thursday, June 1 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- Monday, June 5 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.
- Monday, June 5 from 6:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
- Saturday, June 24 from 8:45 a.m. - 12 p.m.
- Tuesday, July 11 from 6:15 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.
- Thursday, July 27 from 12:45 p.m. - 4 p.m.

To register for the foster parent online training, caregivers may contact the DCFS registration unit at 877-800-3393.

To obtain more information about the new on-line foster parent training schedule go to [www.DCFStraining.org](http://www.DCFStraining.org) or email Jean Maher at [jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us).



### Non-PRIDE Inservice Training

**Marion**  
**618-536-7751**

*Educational Issues Facing the Youth of Today*

**FAIRVIEW HEIGHTS** *Ramada Inn*  
June 1 (Thu) 6:30-9 p.m.

**East St. Louis**  
**618-650-3213**

*ABCs of Substance Abuse for Foster Parents*

Date and location to be announced.